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ABSTRACT

The responsive model of evaluation has been seen as an alternative to formal evaluation models. This model was used for the evaluation of a Certificate in Industrial Relations program in a Quebec French university. This study focused on two main objectives: first, the local utility of the program being assessed, along with the major problems encountered by the administrators; and second, identifying the advantages and limits of the model by comparing them to those reported in the literature. Regarding the first objective, the rich, detailed and pertinent information enabled the evaluator to sketch out a portrait of the situation. The evaluation results and findings were transformed into specific recommendations to improve the program. Concerning the second objective, several advantages and limits cited in the literature were confirmed and new ones were found. Specific recommendations on the use of the responsive model included: (1) use of an evaluation contract; (2) disseminate information as to the evaluation process and product; (3) involve a specialist to corroborate data; and (4) use constant feedback as an essential condition not only to responsive evaluation but also to all evaluative approaches. (Author/PN)

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The Pros and Cons of Responsive Evaluation

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Abstract

The responsive model of evaluation has been seen as an alternative to formal evaluation models. The model has been used for the evaluation of a program in a Quebec French university. The study was focusing on two main objectives: first, the local utility of the program being assessed and, the major problems encountered by the administrators and, second, identifying the advantages and the limits of the model, comparing them to those reported in the literature. As far as the first objective is concerned, the rich, detailed and pertinent information enabled the evaluator to sketch out a portrait of the situation. The evaluation results and findings were transformed into specific recommandations apt to improve the program. As for the second objective, several advantages and limits cited in the literature were confirmed whereas some new ones were found. Specific recommandations about the use of the responsive model are presented as concluding remarks.

Introduction

For the last decade, criticisms have been adressed to formal models of programs' evaluation (Guba, 1969; Stake, 1976; Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Borich and Jemelka, 1982). Among the most significant ones, we find: methodological inadequacies of the models; their lack of comprehension of the social and political contexts; the biases of the formal approach more preoccupied by influential audiences than by the concerned ones; the lack of realism of the criteria used to measure the success of a program; the irrelevance of the approach since it is concerned with questions of no interest to the different audiences; finally the uselesness of the models is stressed since more often than not the situation remains unchanges. Weiss stressed the following:

1. the emphasis is placed on the concerns of those who have the power rather than on those involved in the program (Berk and Rossi, 1976; Parlett and Hamilton, 1976; Patton, 1978; Stake, 1978; Cochran, 1980; Coleman, 1980; House, 1980; Datta, 1981);
2. the criteria used to measure the success of a program lack realism (Caro, 1971; Schwartz, 1980);
3. the results are often useless since they do not influence the decision making (Weiss, 1972; Scott and Shore, 1979; Rutman, 1980);
4. the methods used in research are more often than not inadequate in evaluation (Cochran, 1980).

Finally, Gold (1981) argues that in the past and in order to avoid confrontations with their collegues, evaluators were more concerned about methodology than by the beneficiaries preoccupations.

An Alternative: the naturalistic evaluation

The naturalistic approach to evaluation has been presented as an alternative to the traditionnal models of programs' evaluation (Levine, 1974; Stake, 1976; Parlett and Hamilton, 1976; Guba et Lincoln, 1981). This approach presents the following characteristics:

- it is centered on the activities of a program rather than on its intents;
- it favors any instruments that will allow the gathering of the needed information;
- it is responsive to the values of the different participants which constitute the criteria for making the judgments;
- finally, the structure used to collect the information emerged from and is transformed by the situations.

The naturalistic approach must basically meet the following two conditions:

1. the evaluator imposes a minimum of constraints on the antecedents;
2. the evaluator imposes a minimum of constraints on the participants' behaviors.

Several models gather together under the general heading "Naturalistic approach". Among these we find the judiciary model (Owens, 1973; Levine, 1974; Wolf, 1975); the transactional model (Rippey,

1973); the illuminating model (Parlett and Hamilton, 1976); the connaisseur model (Eisner, 1976) and the responsive model (Stake, 1976; Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Borich and Jemelka, 1982).

The responsive model

The responsive model stresses most particularly preoccupations, questions, and problems encountered by the different audiences concerned by the program under evaluation. Therefore, important for the evaluator to have a pluralistic view of the program including the different points of view, and the emerging conflicts. In that sense, the responsive model structure is quite flexible and the evaluation process is likely to change on the basis of the in-coming information. Qualitative as well as quantitative analysis are acceptable. Most important, the evaluator is seen as a participant.

According to Scriven (1978), Guba and Lincoln (1981), the responsive model of evaluation may take two major orientations [which complement each other (Guba and Lincoln, 1981)], namely:

1. the determination of the merit of the entity being evaluated or
2. the determination of the value of the entity being evaluated.

The merit is more an estimation of the absolute intrinsic quality whereas the value is a contextual related quality. The distinction between the two concepts is important since the judgments wil be different depending upon the chosen orientation. The assessment of the internal quality is often referred to as formative evaluation.

On the other hand, the assessment of the contextual quality of a program is referred to as summative evaluation. For Guba and Lincoln (1981) these dimensions complement each other.

Insert table 1 here

The evaluation study

The program

The program being evaluated was a Certificate in Industrial Relations which is offered in a continuous education program in a Quebec French university. This program, of a proficiency type, was implemented in 1970. The expected students would come from theindustrial relations field, or be at an executive or managerial level. The admissions requirements were: a first university degree or, a college diploma plus one year experience in Industrial Relations (I.R.) or, three years experience in I.R. Over 1800 students were enrolled from 1970 to 1982.

In a previous study, Hurteau (1982) found some interesting problems which convinced the administrators that something was wrong with the program and therefore prompted the evaluation process.

Among these we find:

1. clients were different than those expected: in fact, 86% of them did not have any experience in I.R.; only 14% of the students were working in the field of I.R.; only 21% of the students had a first university degree whereas administrators expected almost all of them would so;

2. an incredible rate of drop outs. In fact, over the years 52% of the students did drop out of the program;

3. finally, the program had sustained no substantial changes since its implementation.

On the basis of that information, the administrators accepted to have their program evaluated and, furthermore, they agreed to the idea of using a naturalistic approach.

The evaluation process

1. The local utility

Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggest the use of a need assessment to determine the local utility of a program (summative evaluation of the value). We did proceed as suggested by Kaufman and English (1979) and Witkin (1984), inducing potential needs (alpha needs) by interviewing workers in the field (administrators, labor union representatives, etc.), graduates of the program and lecturers in the program. A sample of 32 persons were asked the following question: "To what needs should the program answer in order to be useful to the students enrolled in the Industrial Relations Certificate?". The gathered information was submitted to a content analysis and the end result

contributed to the preliminary version of the needs assessment instrument. The first draft questionnaire was then submitted to both administrators and teaching staff who were requested to study, correct and complete it according to their experiment. This second step revealed itself unsuccessful. In order to elaborate the final version of the instrument, an analysis of the courses' objectives was done and interviews were conducted among the teaching staff. The resulting final needs assessment instrument (Likert scale) was administered to the 550 program's graduates who were asked two questions:

1. "to what extent is the actual program, responding to each of the identified needs?"

and

2. "to what extent should it be responding to each of these needs?"

The observed differences between the actual and the desired states of the 280 returned questionnaires (47% response rate) were analysed, and the local utility of the program determined. Among the findings, we found that 75% of the 33 potential needs were judged at least important and that the certificate as a whole did not seem, in its actual form, to offer an adequate coverage for them.

2. The problems

The information about the problems related to the program was collected in several steps:

- first, a serie of informal interviews was conducted among graduates of the program; they were asked to identify any problems related to the program whether academic, human, teaching staff, supervision, etc... and,

- second, a serie of interviews was conducted among drop outs (only 15 of them were located and accepted to participate) and potential drop outs of the program (a sample of 60 students who had not registered for two semesters in a row). They were asked two questions, one about the reasons for droping out of the program (or would make them drop out of the program) and the other, related to the problems associated with the program.

A portrait of the situation was then sketched and submitted to the administrators who, at first, desagreed with the identified problems. A few months later, with their agreement and in order to validate the information, a questionnaire was sent to the entire student population. Results were similar to those of the interviews.

The problems identified fell into four categories: students' admission (laxism, students coming from different backgrounds, etc.); teaching (absence of clear objectives, bad teaching, etc.) and teaching staff (part time job to make some extra money, lack of interest in the program, etc.); students' supervision (no welcome group, offices closed because courses given at night; administrators non-available, etc.); formation as a whole (overall evaluation positive but harsh comments about the program's administrators preoccupations, university's interest, etc.).

Advantages and limits of responsive evaluation

A review of the literature about the responsive model of evaluation was conducted in order to list the advantages as well as disadvantages related to the process. The idea was (1) to compare the findings in terms of similarities and differences and (2) to indicate any new thoughts derived from the present process and findings.

Advantages

Some of the advantages listed in the literature were confirmed by the present study.

1. As stated by Newcomer and Bernstein (1984); Stake and Hoke (1976); Stake and Pearsol (1981), the approach allows questions to emerge (the heterogeneity of the clientele, the absence of supervision of the lecturers with respect to their syllabi, evaluation procedures, teaching, etc., the content overlap of several courses, etc., are examples of emerging information). This observation meets Rachkel's account (1976), who states that the approach allows the identification and the meeting of the clients' concerns.

2. We agree with Kalman (1976), Rockwell (1982), Schermerhorn and Williams (1982), Preskill (1983), who all say that the data collected by this approach allow the evaluator to present a sketched portrait, accessible to concerned audiences and responding to their information needs. For instance, the content analysis of the information gathered by the interviews enabled us to identify some of the problems faced by the program and to illustrate them with facts, textual notes.

3. As Stake (1983), we observed that immediate adjustments were possible when the gathered information was made available to the decision-makers as soon as it emerged. For instance, in the present study, the first presentation or portrait of the problems provoked almost instant modifications. This observation is similar to the one made by Kalman (1976) and Klintberg (1976), for whom the results press to action and can easily be transformed into specific recommandations.

4. We observed, as Schermerhorn and Williams (1982), Newcomer and Berstein (1984) did, that the evaluator's immersion favours his rapid comprehension of the program.

5. As Guba and Lincoln wrote (1981), with this approach, the values and the different points of view which influence the decisions are put forward and the direction of action emerge.

Due to different circumsta ces, the following items were not sustained by the present study.

1. Constant feedback between the evaluator and the stakeholders does facilitate the acceptation of results (Schermerhorn and Williams, 1979; Newcomer and Berstein, 1984).

2. Constant feedback between the evaluator and the stakeholders creates an atmosphere of cooperation and sympathy toward the evaluation process (Rockwell, 1982; Michael, 1984; Newcomer and Berstein, 1984).

However, in previous study we found that constant feedback did in fact have the above advantages and it was one of the major reasons for us to choose the responsive evaluation in the present study.

The following advantages, though emerging from the study, are not mentioned in the literature.

1. The responsive evaluation allows the identification of resistances and oppositions to the approach or to the gathered informations and the possibility to make needed adjustments. For instance, following the presentation of the portrait of the situation sketched by means of interviews, the administrators showed strong desagreement, blamed the quality of the informants, questioned the credibility of the students... Letting things cooled down for a while, the evaluator suggested a cross validation of the information by means of a questionnaire to be sent to all students in the program. Being convinced of the importance of the information in their management process, the administrators agreed and actively participated in the process of building the questionnaire.

2. The meaty description of the program and of its problems favors a certain transferability of information to similar ones. For instance, the gathered information about the problems of the Certificate in Industrial Relations helped solving similar problems in other certificates. To some extent it helped administrators of other programs in their decision-making.

Limits

Some of the limits encountered in the present evaluation match those found in other studies:

1. The time necessary to build the evaluation instruments can be lengthy (Klintberg, 1976). In the present study, the interviews,

their content analysis, the analyses of the courses' syllabi, the needs assessment questionnaire... were time consuming.

2. The responsive approach implies a participation of the audiences to the construction and to the use of the instruments. According to Stake (1983), the persons involved do not always have the experience nor the expertise in evaluation and therefore problems may arise. The construction of the needs assessment questionnaire constitutes an example of such a problem; we had to change the initial procedures and the final version was not easy to come up with.

3. The operating costs are quite high. Schermerhorn and Williams (1979) have compared the costs associated with both the naturalistic and the formalist models and found the ratio to be $6,000/$570.00. We can not substantiate those figures since we did not post any cost. However, it is our belief that we have done so the costs would have been much higher using a responsive model.

The literature identifies some limits that were not noticeable in our evaluation study:

1. According to Rackel (1976), Sorlie and Essex (1978), the approach is not always suitable to collect the necessary information and therefore the use of other models is sometime necessary to fill the limits of the responsive model. Rackel (1976) reserves the use of the responsive model to the evaluation of new programs.

2. Van Hoose (1977) insists on the fact that, because of its flexibility, the responsive model can generate some difficulties in maintaining the focus and in collecting the information.

3. The results may seem oversimplified and disappointing, if one consider the way they are presented (portrait) (Stake and Pearson, 1981).

4. The approach is not so effective if one tries to find answers to specific questions, identified from the start or if one tries to prove rather than to comprehend (Stake, 1983).

However, we have identified some disadvantages not found in the literature.

1. If the approach creates an atmosphere of cooperation and allows the identification of resistances, it can also keep the evaluator under the stakeholders' moods. For instance, when we presented to the administrators the portrait of the situation, their attitude was one of distrust.

2. The responsive model allows the information to emerge and insists on the implication of the stakeholders. But, in doing so, the process can be slowed down. For instance, the interviews conducted among the drop outs and graduates were useful in sketching the situation, but they also provoked harsh reactions from the administrators and resulted in an important delay.

3. The approach is very demanding on the evaluator and as such is not easily accessible. The evaluator must have a great capability of adaptation and lots of personal resources (managing the stakeholders' resistances, adapting the information to the different audiences, etc.) as well as professional skills (conducting interviews, constructing the evaluation instruments: needs assessment, questionnaires, data analysis, etc...).

The following recommandations will be the concluding remarks of this paper.

1. Guba and Lincoln (1981) talk about the contract to be signed, at the beginning by both the evaluator and the stakeholders, which should specify the roles as well as the responsibilities of each of the parties. We do not believe that an evaluation can be done without a contract or at least a certain form of agreement. However, we think that it is almost imperative if one wants to use the responsive evaluation model. The structure being flexible and the implication of stakeholders being constant the evaluator can with a contract objectively reposition the persons into the process and in so doing protect himself against "sudden change of mood".

2. At the beginning of the process and in order to minimize the biases and misunderstandings and to maximize the collaboration, the evaluator should inform about the process and the procedures all the persons whose collaboration is needed (ex.: draft of needs submitted to the teaching staff).

3. In a situation where the evaluator is not a specialist in the program's field, he sould involve such a specialist to ensure the corroboration of his data.

Finally, we want to insist on the fact that constant feedback is an essential condition not only to the responsive evaluation but also to all evaluative approach.

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Table 1: Relationship of Merit/Worth to the Formative/Summative Distinction: A Curriculum Example

Type of Evaluation	Evaluation seeks to establish: Merit (Developmental Evaluation)	Worth (Adoptive Evaluation)
Formative	Intent: modify and improve design.	Intent: fit entity to local context.
	Audience: entity development team.	Audience: local adaptation team.
	Source of Standards: panel of substantive experts.	Source of Standards: assessment of local context and values.
Summative	Intent: critique, certify, and warrant entity.	Intent: certify and warrant entity for local use.
	Audience: professional peers; potential adopters.	Audience: local decision makers.
	Source of Standards: panel of substantive experts.	Source of Standards: local needs assessment.